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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 12, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE POWER OF THE PRESS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Seems to me that many of the miracles of springtime don't get the appreciation they deserve. The poets have always been singing about nature's miracles outdoors -- the dull buds that burst into bright flowers, the dark earth that changes to a green carpet, and so on.

But why doesn't someone write a poem about the miracles performed indoors every spring by housekeepers? For example, why has no one written a sonnet about the old, dreary-looking, left-over garment that changes into a new spring model?

Listeners, if I were a poet, what lines I could write to the housewives of the country who are skillful at clothing rejuvenation, who keep their families dressed up, and keep the spring budget down!

I am glad to see that the economists, at least, are giving the make-over artist her due these days. Recent studies of family-living costs have shown in no uncertain figures what a considerable amount the family saves when the homemaker is a good seamstress.

Probably we can't all be make-over artists. Some women have a prejudice against sewing, and some just aren't handy with a needle. But plenty of others would do a little spring making-over if they knew a few secrets of success, if they could fix over garments without having them look homemade. Pressing at the right stages of making is the real secret to sewing.

Well, my make-over friends and also the clothing people at the Bureau of Home Economics tell me that one big secret of success is knowing how to press. The power of the press on old -- yes, and on new fabrics is remarkable. The right kind of an ironing board, the right amount of heat and steam, the right pressing cloth, a good iron, and some pressing pads. Listeners, with that very simple equipment, you'd be surprised what you can do with old clothes.

First, about the ironing board. Some people struggle along with any sort of board to press on. But not the skillful tailor or the good home dressmaker. Any make-over artist will tell you that you need above everything else a well-padded, smooth board that stands firmly on the floor or is attached solidly to the wall. If you haven't enough padding on your board, the pressing will make your garment streaked and shiny, especially on the seams. If you have too much padding, too soft a board, the pressing won't "take", anymore than it would if you tried to do your pressing on a sofa cushion. Again, if your padding has wrinkles or lumps or seams in it, these defects will show up in any garment you

press over it. And if your cover isn't fastened on the board smooth and tight, or if the board itself is shaky or unsteady, the job of pressing will be twice as difficult. For good workmanship you need good tools. And that applies to ironing boards as to everything else.

Here's what the best presser I know tells me about the way she pads her ironing board. She says she generally uses several thicknesses of old smooth blankets or canton flannel, but she has also used one of the pads the stores sell for the purpose. She pads her board until it feels just slightly cushiony, but not enough to be so thick and soft that her iron sinks in it. She tacks the padding on with large-headed tacks. Then she stretches a clean, smooth cover over the padding. She finds that new unbleached muslin or boatsail twill makes a strong, smooth, and inexpensive cover that lasts longer than the familiar old bedsheet, often used for the purpose. Of course, she says that when she uses new material on an ironing board she is careful to wash out any starch or dressing from the fabric first.

So much for the ironing board. Now about the iron. The safest kind of iron, and usually the most convenient kind, too, is one with heat controls. Nowadays many of the new irons have heat controls that you can set for different fabrics -- low heat for wool and silk, higher heat for cotton and linen. The good pressers of my acquaintance are always very careful about their irons, keep them clean, and away from dust and moisture and grease. They usually have a box or drawer where they put their iron when not in use.

The pressing cloth is another matter of concern for every good presser. Cheesecloth -- a square yard of it -- makes a good pressing cloth for heavy silk and light wool material. Heavy wools need a heavier pressing cloth which will hold more moisture and provide more steam for pressing. For them a square of the same canvas used in covering the board is often a good choice. Many dressmakers find that tissue paper is better than a pressing cloth for silk. But for any kind of wool you always need cloth. Like the iron, the pressing cloth needs to be kept clean and ready for use.

Long ago the professionals in the pressing field -- tailors and cleaners and so on -- discovered the advantages of small hard pads that will fit in sleeves and other difficult parts of a garment. These pads are like hard cushions. You can press on them just as you do on an ironing board. They are easy to make and more convenient than the little sleeve-boards that old-fashioned housekeepers used to have. If you have two or three of these pads -- one long and narrow for long sleeves, one shorter and thicker, and one cut in something of a ham-shape, called a "tailor's ham", you'll be able to give a professional press to any garment.

Cut your pressing pads of heavy ticking or some other firm material. Stitch around the edges leaving just enough of an open space to stuff in the sawdust. Stuff the pad very firmly with sawdust and then sew up the opening. Next, cover tightly with a soft material like outing flannel. Over this, put a cover of muslin which you can remove and launder just like an ironing-board cover. A good pad is as smooth and hard as the ironing-board itself without one lump, wrinkle or soft spot.

There, listeners, is the simple equipment for a good press. And as we said at the beginning, the power of the press has much to do with the make-over miracles of springtime.

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